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ABSTRACT

This report describes an evaluation of Project SELF HELP, a school-based family literacy program serving parents and other caretakers, elementary school age children, and preschool children 2 days per week during the school year. A summer reading program was also available to families. The evaluation was conducted in 1992-1993 to inform program design and implementation, and to study the effects of the program on individuals and families. Parent literacy was assessed using tests of basic skills in math, reading, and spelling, and functional literacy in reading/life skills and math. The adults also completed assessments of their home educational environment and beliefs about their parenting role. Preschool children were assessed for reading readiness, comprehension, receptive vocabulary and letter recognition. Grades, attendance, teacher materials, and observations of program components were also used in the evaluation. Results indicated gains in mean scores on all measures of literacy and math for adults in the program. The preschool children, on average, made gains on all literacy assessments from fall to spring. Report card grades improved in reading, language, and math. For elementary school children attending the summer reading program, reading scores improved from spring to the end of summer. Final sections of the report include: (1) three case studies and issues they raise for family literacy practitioners, researchers, and policymakers; (2) lessons learned from the perspective of the program coordinator; and (3) the questions that remain from the researcher's perspective. Contains 26 references. (HTH)

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PROJECT SELF HELP

A Family Focus on Literacy

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Johns Hopkins University

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

Abstract

Project SELF HELP, a school-based family literacy program, served parents and other caretakers, elementary school age children, and preschool children two days per week during the school year. A summer reading program was also available to families.

Gains in mean scores on all measures of literacy were achieved by adults in the program sample. Mean math scores on the WRAT improved by three grade level equivalents and a significant eight point gain on the MAPP functional literacy test was observed.

The preschool children, on average, made gains on all literacy assessments from fall to spring. The prekindergarten, kindergarten, and elementary children's report card grades improved in reading, language, and math from the first to the fourth quarter of the school year. The number of tardy days per semester decreased slightly from fall to spring in the prekindergarten and kindergarten sample. The number of days absent per semester decreased from fall to spring in the elementary sample.

For the elementary children attending the summer reading program, WRAT reading scores improved from the spring to the end of the summer. Report card grades remained at similar levels from spring to fall.

Final sections of the report include: (1) three case studies and the issues they raise for family literacy practitioners, researchers and policy makers; (2) lessons learned from the perceptive of the program coordinator; and (3) the questions that remain from the researcher's perspective.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support of Larry Dolan, senior research associate; Joyce Epstein, Center Co-Director; Dolores Bramer, SELF HELP Program Coordinator; and Cinder Hypki, Director of SECO's LIFT Literacy Services in conducting the evaluation and preparing this report. She also acknowledges the cooperation of Project SELF HELP participants and teaching staff in conducting the evaluation.

Introduction

This is a story about me. I'm learning a lot about myself. I am learning to read and spell by helping my grandchildren with their homework, and reading lots of books. I encourage my grandchildren to read books every day...
(By Our Own Hands, 1992)

This story, written by a participant in Project SELF HELP, embodies the goals of many family literacy programs -- to give parents or other caretakers a second chance at education so they may provide their children with increased support for learning. However, it is a long and arduous road that leads adults who have few literacy skills to take the step to enroll in a program and to reach their goals for themselves and their children. Family literacy programs, particularly those based in schools, can eliminate some of the obstacles that parents face in improving literacy skills. They can also increase the coordination and collaboration with their children's teachers, other school staff, and the community.

Our concern about the failure of many educational programs to reduce the low level of achievement for some children has escalated in recent years. Many researchers and practitioners have turned their attention to practices that attempt to "boost" the family's ability to support children's learning. We have long known that the educational level of the mother affects children's achievement (Sticht, 1989; Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986); that the educational level of parents predicts more of the variance in student achievement than do other family background variables (Mason & Allen, 1986; Anderson et. al., 1985); and that the relationship of the "home curriculum" to children's educational achievement (Heath, 1983; Teale, 1986) is important. Parents who have not received their high school diploma or have low levels of basic skills are less able to provide their children with the home environment and supportive activities that facilitate and support their children's achievement. Family literacy programs attempt to improve the education of the mother, or other caretaker, in order to improve the quality of family life and the achievement of the child.

Family literacy programs attempt not only to teach the parent, or the child, but to directly address the parent-child relationship. Research suggests a correlational relationship between family education variables and children's achievement, <u>not</u> a causal relationship (Hayes, 1991). One of the key components of a family literacy program which distinguishes this service delivery model from others is attention to the <u>transmission</u> of the parent's newly developing skills and strengths to the child. The primary challenge of family literacy researchers and practitioners is to gain greater understanding of this process of transmission of

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tests of basic skills and life skills. Parents also reported high levels of satisfaction with the program.

The SELF HELP Program

The School Year Program

The SELF HELP program was based at an elementary school in one of the more needy areas of the city. According to the most recent census data available (1980), approximately 62% of the adults in the community completed less than four years of high school. Employment opportunities have decreased 13.6% since 1980. The school population reflects these economic and educational disadvantages. The 1991 Baltimore City Maryland School Performance Program Report indicates that 30% of the children in the school receive Chapter 1 services (compared to a 9% citywide average) and 76% receive free or reduced lunch (compared to a 23% citywide average).

The principal's support for the program was an important factor in locating SELF HELP at this school. The principal of the elementary school responded to the needs of some parents who were finding it difficult to help their children with their homework because of their own low literacy skills. The parents' literacy needs could not be met by the principal or other school staff, yet she recognized the importance of helping these parents.

Project staff included a full-time adult education teacher/program coordinator, part-time preschool teacher, part-time after-school tutor, part-time parent liaison, and full-time VISTA volunteer (who began in February, 1992). The after-school tutor was also a 1st grade teacher at the school.

The school-year program operated three hours per day, two days per week, from October to June. Classes for adults, preschool children, and elementary children were held in separate rooms in the school building. Approximately two times per month, classes for parents and children met together.

The goals for parents/caretakers in the program were to:

(1) increase literacy skills -- including learning to read, spell, write, and compute;

(2) increase parenting skills -- including how to praise, discipline, teach cooperative and responsible behavior; and

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The goals of parent-child time were to:

(1) increase parents' beliefs that parent-child activities could be fun and rewarding;

(2) increase parents' ability to respond positively to children's natural curiosity for learning; and

(3) support and model the integration of parents' new skills in natural learning opportunities.

Parent-child time was held approximately every other week. Parents who had children in both the preschool and elementary programs alternated working with their children. Periodically, parent-child activities involved all family members.

Parent-child time is often mentioned as one of the weaker components in program delivery by family literacy practitioners (ILRC, 1992). Staff training focused on three areas: (1) arrangement of the physical environment, (2) staff interactions with parents and children, and (3) preparation and follow-up of parent-child time in the adult-alone and child-alone components. The researcher held an initial training session with the program coordinator, who then assumed primary responsibility for training the staff.

Program staff met periodically to plan parent-child activities and to choose the skills that teachers needed to reinforce in their classes. Parents and students became more actively involved in planning activities and preparing materials for parent-child time as the year progressed.

The Summer Reading Program

The summer reading program was available to families who attended the school year program. It operated three days per week for eight weeks. Families met at the local library for activities related to the weekly field trip to a community educational resource. Sites for field trips ranged from an art gallery and a museum in Baltimore to the FBI facility in Washington, D.C. Various public transportation systems were used to get to the sites. Pre-trip activities included selecting, reading, and discussing books related to the theme of the trip and related art activities. Post-trip activities included a discussion of the trip, telling stories related to the trip, related art activities, and problem solving.

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the adults in the SELF HELP program ranged from the fourth grade to a special education 10th grade class, with the majority having completed eighth or ninth grade. No participants had graduated from high school or had completed a graduate equivalency exam (GED).

In the preschool sample, two of the children were enrolled in the Chapter 1 prekindergarten program and six of the children attended a half-day session of kindergarten, in addition to SELF HELP's day care program. Five children were in no other day care or school program. The elementary children were in grades one through four.

The summer program began in July of 1992 with 12 parents and 22 children. Seven families from the 1991-1992 school year program and two families from the 1990-1991 program attended the summer program.

The Measurement Instruments

Assessment in the school-year program. Parent literacy was assessed with a test of basic skills, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) in math, reading, and spelling. The Maryland Adult Performance Program (MAPP) and the California Adult Competency Assessment System (CASAS) were used as measures of functional literacy in reading/life skills and math. Within the first month of attendance the adults also completed assessments of their home educational environment (Dolan, 1983) and beliefs about their parenting role (Segal, 1985).

The preschool children who were in no other program were assessed with an indicator of reading readiness, Concepts About Print (Clay, 1979); the comprehension subtest of the Merrill Language Screening Test (1980); the receptive vocabulary subtest of the Test of Language Development (1988); and an inventory of letter recognition.

Report card grades, including the number of days tardy and absent, were available for the prekindergarten, kindergarten, and elementary children.

In addition, the following information was collected to provide descriptive data on the program and effects on participants:

- attendance records
- teacher lesson plans and anecdotal notes
- interviews of program participants, staff, and key stakeholders
- evaluator observations of program components

Assessment in the summer program. Adults were interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the program about their goals for the summer program, their use of community resources, and their use of a library card. Children received incentives for the number of books they read, and were interviewed at the end of the summer about how they liked the program. Families assembled scrapbooks of momentos and artifacts of program activities. Teachers kept daily logs of observations of family interactions.

Results and Discussion

Results of The School-Year Program

Attendance. A total of 186 instructional hours (three hours per session for 62 sessions) was offered to participants in the school-year program. Participants' attendance ranged from six sessions to 62 sessions. The average number of sessions attended was 32.

Project SELF HELP had an open entrance policy. Participants, therefore, could enter at different times in the school year. Between December and March, five of the original 12 families moved away or had very limited attendance, and two new families were added. The school year ended with seven adults (six mothers and one grandmother) in adult education classes, 12 children in the preschool program, and seven children in the elementary program.

Three of the dropouts were interviewed about their reasons for withdrawal. Two had moved from the Baltimore area for economic reasons and the other had stopped attending because of a personal conflict with another participant. One of the dropouts worked on materials at home provided by the adult education teacher and one continued to attend periodically. The two dropouts who were not interviewed attended just one or two of the initial sessions and then never returned. Repeated attempts by the parent liaison and program coordinator to assist them to return to the program were not successful.

Curriculum. A review of the adult education teacher's lesson plans revealed that the average length of lessons was 30 minutes for all curriculum areas except parent-child time, which was held for one hour. Classes focused on eight curriculum areas during the school-year program:

life skills -- 44 lessons	reading -- 39 lessons
personal growth -- 24 lessons	spelling -- 47 lessons
parenting -- 23 lessons	writing -- 30 lessons
parent-child time -- 26 lessons	math -- 50 lessons

Lesson plans for the elementary classes and the preschool classes were not as well documented as the lesson plans for the adult program. A review of the elementary teacher's log book revealed that she focused on homework completion, individual enrichment activities, and group games. The preschool teacher used a multi-sensory, thematic approach to introduce concepts of color, number, and letters.

Adult literacy. Basic descriptive statistics of adults in the school-year program for whom both pre- and posttest scores were available are displayed in Table 1.

Adults were functioning on average at the fourth grade level in reading, third grade level in spelling, and fifth grade level in math on the WRAT when they began the program. Scores on the CASAS and MAPP indicate functional skill levels, but do not provide grade level equivalents. A score in the 150-200 point range indicates difficulty with basic level skills. A score in the 200-220 point range indicates competence in entry level skills. On the CASAS, adults were functioning at the upper end of the entry level range; on the MAPP, they were functioning at the lower end of the entry level range.

Gains in mean scores on all measures of literacy were achieved by the program sample. Mean math scores on the WRAT improved by three grade level equivalents -- a very significant change. Also significant was the eight point gain on the MAPP reading/life skills functional literacy test. Three to four point gains per year is the average expected gain on this test.

Table 1

PROJECT SELF HELP

Descriptive Statistics for Parents / Caretakers

	Program		
	Mean	**SD**	**N**
WRAT:			
Reading - Pre	44.8 (4.5)	15.6	9
Reading - Post	46.6 (4.7)	17.7	9
Spelling - Pre	29.8 (3.4)	11.3	9
Spelling - Post	33.3 (3.8)	14.0	9
Math - Pre	30.7 (5B)	4.8	9
Math - Post	38.2 (8B)	6.7	9
CASAS - Pre	221.0	11.4	9
CASAS - Post	222.1	10.4	9
MAPP - Pre	203.7	7.5	9
MAPP - Post	211.7	9.1	9
Home - - Pre Environment	103.3	10.9	6*
Home - - Post Environment	110.0	6.8	6
Parenting Role - Pre	33.8	4.3	6
Parenting Role - Post	32.8	1.1	6

WRAT
Reading raw score range 1 to 124 (Grade Level Equivalent)
Spelling raw score range 1 to 107 (GLE)
Math raw score range 1 to 59 (GLE, B = beginning level

CASAS, MAPP Scale (150-200: difficulty with basic level skills; 200-220: entry level skills)
Home Environment Scale (Range of possible scores is 42 to 210)
Parenting Role Scale Range 24 (Disciplinarian) to 120 (Teacher)

* Three participants were not available on pre- and post testing dates

Children's literacy. Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for the children in the preschool and elementary program who were present for pre and post measures. Panel A shows the scores for preschool children who were in no other program (N=5). Panel B shows report card grades for prekindergarten and kindergarten in the preschool program (N=7). Panel C shows report card grades for children in the elementary program (N=7).

The preschool children, on average, made gains on all literacy assessments from fall to spring. The inventory of letter identification showed the largest gain. This reflects the focus of classroom instruction on reading readiness activities, such as alphabet identification. The gains in comprehension and print awareness also reflect the program's reading readiness objectives.

The prekindergarten and kindergarten children's report card grades improved in reading, language, and math from the first to the fourth quarter. The number of tardy days per semester decreased slightly from fall to spring.

The elementary children's report card grades improved in reading, language, and math from the first to the fourth quarter. The number of days absent per semester decreased from fall to spring.

Parent-child time. The home educational environment scale was used to measure the effects of parent-child time on parents' support for education in the home. This self-report questionnaire assesses the level and frequency of parental practices in the home which support education. Moderate increases in the assessment of the home educational environment indicate that parents talked more to their children about school at home, had higher expectations for their children's educational achievements, and provided more educational resources for their children.

The parenting role scale was used to measure the effects of parent-child time on parents' beliefs about their role as their child's primary educator. This self-report questionnaire assesses parents' beliefs about their influence on children's behavior and educational achievement. No significant changes were observed in mean scores on the parenting role scale.

Qualitative changes in parent behavior during parent-child time were observed that perhaps were not adequately tapped by the quantitative measures used. The program coordinator reports that parents at the beginning of the year expressed resistant and negative attitudes towards being with their children. They made comments indicating their disbelief that activities with their children could be fun. Parent behavior towards their children was often overly restrictive and punitive. As the year progressed, parents became more positive towards spending time with their

Table 2

PROJECT SELF HELP

Descriptive Statistics for Children in Preschool & Elementary Programs

Program	Mean	SD	N
Preschool: in no other program			
Receptive Lang. - Fall	4.8	4.6	5
Receptive Lang. - Spring	5.0	2.5	5
Comprehension - F	1.2	1.7	5
Comprehension - S	2.2	2.2	5
Print Awareness - F	1.0	1.0	5
Print Awareness - S	2.2	3.8	5
Letter I.D. - F	.0	.0	5
Letter I.D. - S	5.4	10.4	5
Preschool: Pre K & Kindergarten			
Reading Grade - F	2.0	.0	7
Reading Grade - S	2.25	.5	7
Lang. Grade - F	2.0	.0	7
Lang. Grade - S	2.5	.7	7
Math Grade - F	2.0	.0	7
Math Grade - S	3.0	.8	7
No. of Tardy Days - F	1.1	3.0	7
No. of Tardy Days - S	1.0	1.5	7
No. of Days Absent - F	1.8	1.6	
No. of Days Absent - S	3.7	3.9	7
Elementary Children			
Reading Grade - F	2.0	.81	7
Reading Grade - S	2.2	.75	7
Lang. Grade - F	2.0	.57	7
Lang. Grade - S	2.5	.70	7
Math Grade - F	2.2	.75	7
Math Grade - S	2.5	.97	7
No. of Tardy Days - F	1.5	2.8	7
No. of Tardy Days - S	2.4	3.6	7
No. of Days Absent - F	2.1	2.8	7
No. of Days Absent - S	1.4	.97	7

Receptive Lang., 1 (low) to 35 (high)
Comprehension Lang., 1 (low) to 5 (high)
Print Awareness, 1 (low) to 15 (high)
Letter Identification, 1 (low) to 45 (high)
Grades Scale (1 = Low ... 4 = High)

children in parent-child time and were less likely to use restrictive and punitive practices with their children.

The following observations typify the qualitative changes in staff and parent behaviors during parent-child time from fall to spring.

Fall, 1991 observation

Preschool children and their teacher are seated on the floor reading a story. Parents are standing on the sidelines -- some are talking, others just looking at the teacher, others are looking around the room. After the story, parents, children, and the teacher go outside to the playground. The teacher organizes a game of jump rope in one corner and relay races in another corner. Parents talk together on the sidelines or watch their children. Most of the interaction takes place between the children and the teacher. When they come back in, the teacher gives each parent a large sheet of paper and asks each parent to trace their child's body and label the body parts. One parent does not know how to spell "forehead," another parent cannot get her active three-year-old to stay still long enough to trace her body, and the activity ends with this parent yelling at the child to stay still.

Spring, 1992 observation

A shy three-year-old holding a hand-colored drawing of "Papa Bear" whispers, "Someone's been eating my porridge!" His mother prompts him by reading the next line from her script, while his fourth-grade brother helps to keep the assemblage of props from tumbling off the stage. Meanwhile, another child holds her "Mama Bear" figure by its popsicle stick handle and waits patiently for her mother's cue. Other adults and children form an excited audience and follow the action by reading from copies of the classic tale.

In end-of-year interviews with parents (n= 5), each mentioned that parent-child time was one of the most enjoyable parts of the SELF HELP program. Interviews with program staff confirmed that the staff felt more confident in implementing parent-child time as a result of training.

Discussion of the School-Year Program

Measuring change. Dolan (1992), in his evaluation of the first year of Project SELF HELP, recommended the use of a control group of adults to better assess the impact of the program on participants. We were unable to identify a control group of families for this evaluation because of program participants' very low level of functioning. This is a challenge that many programs serving disadvantaged families face which needs to be resolved in future research.

We focused instead on pre- and posttest measures, recognizing that the reliability of measuring change was limited by the small sample size, inconsistent attendance, high drop out rate, and the open entry policy. The low number of participants, the variety in the intensity of services received by the sample, and the multiple sub-groups within the sample make statistical analyses beyond frequencies impossible.

Qualitative methods allowed us to gain insight into more subtle processes at the individual level. Even with these limitations, the patterns of results are instructive. Parents who participated in the SELF HELP program made significant improvements on measures of literacy. The significant gains found in math and reading/life skills reflect the focus of the adult education classes. These curriculum areas were given the most attention in daily instruction: math -- 50 lessons, reading -- 39 lessons, and life skills -- 44 lessons.

The MAPP and CASAS functional skills tests appear to be more effective in tapping changes in adult literacy skills than the WRAT. The WRAT is a standardized achievement test primarily designed for elementary school children. Literacy programs are often required by funders to use this measure because of its familiarity and its use of grade level equivalents. While it may be useful to indicate initial skill levels in adults, it should not be used as a single measure of change in adults' skills.

The home educational environment survey seemed to be effective in assessing changes in parents' support for education in the home. The lack of change found on the parenting role survey may be related to problems with the survey instrument. We adapted the response options and the wording of some items for our population. It was a useful measurement of change in some parents (see Gloria's case) but needs continued refinement for family literacy populations.

This instrument has been successfully used in intervention programs that focus on young children and involve parents to improve the effectiveness of the child's program (Segal, 1985). This child-focused type of program differs philosophically and programmaticly from family literacy programs that integrate

service delivery in a more family-focused context. It makes intuitive sense that as parents gain confidence in their literacy skills and place more emphasis on education in their lives, they would move toward seeing their role as the primary teacher of their children. Our challenge is to continue to develop and refine methods that supplement qualitative data with quantitative measurements of the beliefs of parents.

Equally challenging will be to continue to define the paths by which parent beliefs and practices about education are transmitted to children. Program objectives in each component of family literacy programs need to be aligned and integrated so that the links between components can be identified and evaluated. For example, if a program objective is to improve reading achievement of children, then the adult education component should focus on the skills parents need to support their children's reading -- including their own reading skills and how to transfer adult reading behaviors to children. The children's program objectives would focus on improving reading achievement. Parent-child time would allow both parents and children to practice their newly developing skills in another context, with the guidance of staff.

The improvements in the literacy skills of the preschool children who were in no other program occurred despite the relatively low level of service to this group. Although SELF HELP is a family-focused program, the adults received the most intensive level of service delivery. Even with improvements in adult literacy and parenting skills, we expected that the impact on children would take some time to occur. Further, the preschool program was limited by staff turnover, inadequate supplies and space, and the different age/grade level of children served.

We were not totally satisfied with the appropriateness of the assessments used with the preschool sample, given the population and the level of service delivery. Assessing young children is a challenge of the field. Nevertheless, we need to continue to examine how best to assess young children from disadvantaged families who may be unfamiliar with "preschool type" settings, materials, and testing situations. We have designed a play-based assessment of emergent literacy skills (Connors, 1992) for preschool children that we plan to pilot in future evaluations.

Practices such as teacher observation, anecdotal notes, and performance-based portfolios also may be more sensitive, developmentally appropriate measures for family literacy participants. Observations and anecdotal notes were particularly helpful in providing more depth to the quantitative measures and in documenting subtle changes in Project SELF HELP adults and children. The use of these methods, particularly performance-based portfolios, requires on-going staff training and preparation time. Teacher turnover, lack of staff development time, and lack of staff

preparation time hampered the implementation of these forms of assessment in Project SELF HELP.

Recruitment and retention. The Chapter 1 liaison linked the school and the program in recruiting and retaining families, supporting the program staff and evaluation activities, and coordinating and communicating the needs of the program and families with teachers and other school staff. The liaison's effectiveness was enhanced by her long-standing relationship to the community and the school; she was trusted by the principal, the school staff, and the parents. Sometimes the liaison helped parents approach school staff or negotiate unfamiliar or complicated school procedures. Parents saw her as a "surrogate mother" figure. She often cajoled parents into attending; they trusted her in allowing her to make home visits; and she praised and reinforced their progress at every opportunity.

The children's programs were also an incentive for enrollment for many parents. The program director reported that parents often said they attended Project SELF HELP so that their children could receive the homework help and enrichment activities of the elementary program.

The day care component allowed some parents to give their young children a preschool experience. Most of the children had never attended a preschool or other daycare program. Head Start, or other free preschool programs, are not available in this part of the city. For parents with preschool children, who also had elementary children, the developmental daycare removed a barrier for them to attend the program, providing safe and fun activities for their children while parents were attending classes.

Results of The Summer Program

Attendance. A total of 22 sessions were offered over the summer. Attendance by families ranged from one session to 18 sessions; a core group of five families attended 11 or more sessions.

Role of fathers. Fathers in three of these families joined the group for at least one field trip. The focus and nature of the summer program seemed to facilitate fathers' participation, at least on the field trips. Teachers' logs indicated that a father's presence appeared to have a positive influence on a mother's behavior with her children.

Elementary reading skills. For the summer program, adults and preschool children were not given formal literacy assessments. Elementary students were tested to see whether the summer program affected reading skills. Spring ('92) WRAT-reading

scores and report card grades in reading were compared to August WRAT-reading scores and fall ('92) report card grades in reading.

The summer program eliminated the typical "summer loss" in reading for these disadvantaged elementary children. WRAT reading scores improved from spring to summer and report card grades remained at similar levels from spring to fall for the six elementary children who attended at least 11 sessions of the summer reading program.

Use of community resources. The summer program increased all families' participation in the community. None of the seven new participants in the summer program had ever taken their children to a museum or other educational resource. Seven of the nine families had not used public transportation to take their children on an outing before. Adults in five of the seven families surveyed had library cards. All families, including children, had library cards by the end of the summer program.

Portfolio assessment. Each of the participating families created a scrapbook in which they kept photos, writings, artwork, and other momentos of the field trips. One of the goals of the scrapbook project was to have a vehicle for families to document and reflect upon how the summer program was helping them meet their goals in the project.

This was the first family scrapbook some families had ever assembled. Most adults and children could not discriminate among items that were particularly meaningful to them or that showed progress toward their goals. Families were so proud of their scrapbooks that they put everything in. This may be an appropriate reaction to a new activity that was pleasing to all family members, but it suggests the need to develop strategies to assist families in their reflection and discrimination of the work they include in their portfolio.

Role of non-school activities in achievement. The summer program attempted to model for families how to make learning fun for everyone. It provided families with a positive way to support their children's learning. Reports from program staff and parents suggest that the summer program facilitated attitudes and beliefs towards education that should influence achievement.

Parents commented that:

The trips were fun and I read to my kids more....

I feel closer to my kids than I have in a long time....

My kids are reading a lot more and watching less TV....

The program expanded my kids and our whole family's experience....

An excerpt from a teacher's log states:

> *There seems to be a feeling of group success. We have become more like a group of mutual supporters and friends than a structured learning environment.*" (her underlining)

The program coordinator reported:

> The Summer Reading Program was a very successful component of the SELF HELP program. Each participant family now has at least one library card, and the families began to borrow more books over the summer. Children seemed more inclined to discuss books they had read with their parents. Some children read more than 20 books over the course of the summer sessions. Nearly all showed a reading level gain, rather than the "summer setback" after the eight-week program. One student read 11 books during the summer and the daily newspaper. She increased her reading level by a full grade on the WRAT during the summer session! (Bramer, 1992)

Discussion of the Summer Program

The summer program appears to be a particularly effective component of Project SELF HELP, given the relatively low cost of implementation. The summer reading program extended learning into the community in a supportive and non-threatening manner. It also gave staff greater opportunities than the school-year program to model and reinforce positive parenting behaviors. Negative parent-child relationships need to be addressed in family literacy programs in conjunction with educational and other program goals. The participation of fathers in the summer program also suggests that this component may extend the effects of the program to other family members.

The effectiveness of the summer reading program was probably influenced by the trust established between families and staff and the gains made by families during the school year. Further research is needed to determine if this component is effective as a separate program. At this time, it is best considered as a useful method of reinforcing and extending the effectiveness of the school-year program by reducing summer loss in children's reading skills, improving parent-child relationships, and facilitating the involvement of fathers.

Does SELF HELP Make a Difference?

It is said that we are all alike when the lights are off. We are the same, not different. (Written by a SELF HELP parent for By Our Own Hands; SECO, 1992)

Because family literacy programs are family-centered and offer multiple levels of services to different subgroups, it is appropriate to describe how SELF HELP affected families as a whole. The following three families represent the range of the types of families and types of outcomes experienced in the SELF HELP program. Their stories suggest important issues for other practitioners, researchers, and policy makers as they design, implement, and evaluate family literacy programs and policies. (The names have been changed to assure confidentiality.)

Gloria's Commitment to Education Increases

Gloria, 26 years old, is married and the mother of three school age boys. Her husband is employed and they are not receiving public assistance. Gloria completed the 10th grade, where she was in special education classes in math and reading. Both her parents and her four siblings also dropped out of school. Her husband graduated from high school.

Gloria first began the SELF HELP program in September of 1990, attended 20 sessions, and then dropped out in February of 1991. She rejoined the program in October of 1991, and attended 38 sessions out of 62 sessions offered throughout the project year. Most of her absences were due to her own or her children's illnesses.

Gloria made important and impressive gains in all measures of basic literacy in one year. Her WRAT scores improved 2 months in reading (3.1 to 3.3), 7 months in spelling (2.4 to 3.1) and 1 grade level in math (4th to 5th). On the functional tests, her reading/life skills' scores improved 9 points (212 to 221) and her math scores improved 5 points (199 to 204). The adult literacy teacher reports that Gloria performs below her intelligence level and is probably dyslexic. She has difficulty in demonstrating skills on "isolated," out-of-context type tests such as the WRAT. In the functional tests, individuals like Gloria with suspected learning disabilities can learn to overcome their disabilities through cues in the environment and demonstrate better performance.

On the home educational environment assessment, positive changes in the way Gloria supports her children's learning at home were found. In October of 1991, Gloria reported that she did not talk with her children about school at the dinner table, her children did not have a place to study privately, she seldom or never talked to her children about their future schooling, and she was not involved in any parent involvement activities at the school. In May of 1992, Gloria reported that she talked to her children about school, they had a place to study, she sometimes talked to them about their future schooling, and she was actively involved in the Chapter 1 parent involvement activities.

Her involvement in Chapter 1 is confirmed by the parent liaison, who reports that Gloria volunteered on most of the school days that she was not attending SELF HELP. In addition, scores on the survey of parental beliefs about parenting changed from seeing her role as primarily a disciplinarian to one of "parent as teacher." The program coordinator reported that "Gloria is a very involved parent and gave her children lots of positive feedback."

Gloria's second grade boy is a student of average to above average ability. Report card grades range from 1 (low) to 4 (high). This child's grades improved from the 1st to the 4th quarter in language (1 to 3) and math (1 to 2), but not reading (2 to 2). The classroom teacher reported that he always completed his homework and that his parents often talked to her about how he was doing in school. In the after-school program, this child often asked to learn new things -- the multiplication tables, maps of the states. His parents supported his interests with activities at home.

Gloria's first grade boy is a student of average ability. He showed no change in report card grades from the 1st to the 4th quarter (3 to 3) on reading, language, and math. The classroom teacher reported that he always completed his homework and her assessment of his ability as a student improved from fair to good over the program year. The after-school teacher reported that he "...has come far this year. If you ask him to draw a picture he always includes words...he is confident about his work, enjoys school, and likes challenges."

The kindergartner is having difficulty in school, according to the classroom teacher's report. He did improve on measures of literacy administered in the SELF HELP program -- letter recognition (0 to 3), story comprehension (2 to 4) and receptive vocabulary (1 to 6). The developmental day care teacher reported that he was an enthusiastic learner.

Gloria and her children attended 18 sessions of the summer program and her husband joined the family for one field trip. Gloria and her children had the best attendance record of the summer program. The family did not have a library card at the beginning of the summer but all members did by the end of the program. The two oldest children read over 20 books each and their scores on the WRAT-reading subtest improved by six months for the second grader and five months for the first grader on the spring to the summer assessments.

Gloria has now "graduated" from the SELF HELP program to a more intensive, though still basic skill level, adult education program that SECO operates at their main office. Gloria's increased commitment to education has allowed her to take a big step for her -- she goes out of her usual neighborhood to attend the program. Reports from her current teachers indicate that she is attending regularly and doing well in the classroom.

Issue: Level of Need Versus Level of Service

The SELF HELP project was able to provide Gloria and her family with the level of services she needed to "boost" the quality of her family's life. One of the

trends we have noted in Gloria's case, and others like her in the SELF HELP program, is that the availability of a support system and a relatively stable personal life facilitated her success in the program. This may indicate the need to "match" family needs with the level of service delivery.

Family literacy programs range from low intensity levels of service delivery (as in adult classes only with no parent-child or other coordinating links), to high intensity levels of service delivery (as in programs that run classes for parents and children five days per week). Project SELF HELP, which offers a moderate level of service delivery, may be most appropriate for families with "moderate" needs. There is a critical need for further research that explores level of service versus level of need in order to effectively target and utilize the scarce resources in the field of family literacy.

Lynn's Significant Gains are Interrupted

Lynn is 26 years old, divorced, and the mother of two children. During her enrollment in the program, Lynn was receiving public assistance. She reported that she completed the 5th grade and her parents and four siblings all dropped out of school.

Lynn began Project SELF HELP in October of 1990 and attended 55 sessions over the year. In 1991-92, Lynn attended 13 sessions before she suddenly dropped out of the program. The parent liaison learned that she moved to Delaware to live with her mom because of her economic situation and the high cost of housing in this area.

Lynn made significant and impressive gains in her first year of the project. Her WRAT scores improved seven months in reading (3.7 to 4.4), one grade level in spelling (2.6 to 3.6), and one grade level in math (4th to 5th). On the reading/life skills functional test, Lynn improved six points (213 to 219), again a significant gain. The teacher reported that Lynn was making very good progress, but because of her sudden departure, post-testing for the 1991-92 year was not completed.

Lynn appeared to have the ability to overcome her literacy deficits, but circumstances impeded her progress. The adult education teacher reported that she was very hardworking and often did extra homework activities or other writing assignments on her own.

Lynn appeared to support her children's education at home. She reported on the home educational environment survey that her children did have a place to study, she sometimes talked to them about future schooling, and she felt that their education was extremely important to their success in life. On the survey of parental beliefs about parenting, her score indicated that she viewed her role more as a 'disciplinarian' than a 'teacher.'

Her first-grade child had suspected learning disabilities and was evaluated by the school for placement in special education. This was a

particularly difficult situation for Lynn because of the delays in getting her son tested and placed in a classroom where he could be successful. This child refused to attend the elementary program and often caused Lynn to leave the adult education classes to attend to his needs.

Lynn's second-grade child was at risk of failing. The classroom teacher reported in November 1991 that she was "probably failing", that she almost never completed assignments or stayed on task, and showed poor effort. This child attended the SELF HELP elementary program. The tutor reported that although she liked school and tried to complete most of her homework on her own, she did not get much help from her parent.

Although Lynn made significant gains in literacy and probably could have, with continued effort, received her GED, her own and her children's personal crises interfered with her motivation, energy, and discipline to do so. This is not an uncommon problem in family literacy and other family support programs. The ability of the SELF HELP program to meet the multiple and intensive needs of Lynn and her family was limited.

Issue: Integration of Services

Lynn's case suggests the need for school-based family literacy programs, and others that attempt to meet the needs of the whole family, to work toward increased collaboration with the school and other community agencies in an integrated service delivery model. In order to effectively meet the multiple needs of some families, and to break the cycle of negative consequences of low educational achievement in both parents and children, service deliverers must erase and redefine traditional service delivery boundaries (Nickse, 1990).

Agencies that serve different segments of the target population can adapt services to individual child and family needs more readily, encourage programmatic innovation, and facilitate collaboration with other community resources when multiple service providers work together in an integrated service delivery model (Sugarman, 1991). School-based family literacy programs have an opportunity to coordinate services to children and families in one location so that parents can more easily access and coordinate necessary resources for themselves and their children.

Jean's Sporadic Attendance + Poor Effort = No Gain

Jean is 30 years old, divorced, and the mother of two children. She completed the ninth grade and reports that her mother and two of her three siblings dropped out of school. Jean was receiving public assistance.

Jean began the program in October of 1991 and attended 23 sessions over the program year. Although she never completely dropped out of the program, she had sporadic attendance throughout the project year. She did not attend the summer program.

Jean showed no gains in the basic skills measures of literacy. Her WRAT scores in reading (3.4), spelling (2.5), and math (6th) showed no important change from pre-to-post testing. On the functional skills assessments, Jean improved five points (219 to 224) in reading/life skills and decreased four points in math (204 to 200). The teacher reports that her lack of gains in literacy was not surprising due to her sporadic attendance and her poor effort. Jean rarely did the homework assignments or participated in class discussions. The teacher reported that Jean "had many layers of defenses and acted as if she dared anyone to get through to her."

On the home educational environment (pre-test), Jean appeared to recognize the importance of education -- she felt her children's education was extremely important to their success in life, she expected them to finish high school, and they did have a place to study at home. Her pre-test scores on the survey of parental beliefs about parenting indicate a moderate tendency towards viewing her role as "parent as teacher." Post-test information on these assessments was not available for Jean.

Jean's kindergarten age daughter appeared to be doing fairly well in school. She could not identify any letters at the beginning of the program, but answered four out of five story comprehension questions correctly and showed beginning awareness of print. Her classroom teacher reported that she was a "fair" student, almost always completed assignments, showed good effort, and almost always paid attention. Report card data for the year indicated that this child continued to perform "satisfactory" work and showed "excellent" effort, attention in class, and assignment completion.

The classroom teacher reported that Jean's third grade son was doing fairly well in school in November of 1991 but rated his performance "poor with the ability to do better" at the end of the school year. She also reported that he never did his homework. The elementary tutor reported that he had low self-esteem, he frustrated easily, and he needed much encouragement to complete a task. He was responding positively to a behavior program she had initiated with him.

Jean appeared to have a particularly negative relationship with this child (third grade son). The elementary tutor reported that his mother did not give him much encouragement. The adult instructor reported that Jean often made negative comments about the child and in parent-child time she rarely paid much attention to or was very enthusiastic with this child.

What can be said about the effects of the SELF HELP program on Jean? Although she made few literacy gains, she did continue to attend the program sporadically. Jean's poor effort in class, her negative attitude towards her son, and her defensive nature may indicate her own lack of self-esteem. It is not possible to say whether Jean might have eventually changed some of her negative attitudes through the care and support of the program.

Issue: Defining Dropouts in Family Literacy Programs

We have noted a pattern in other SELF HELP participants to drop in and out of the program depending on the current stability of their personal situations. We may need to develop new definitions or eliminate the label "dropout" for adult learners. Perhaps the adult/family literacy field could develop a "no dropout policy" that would allow adults to create and choose their own educational plan and timetable for completing their goals. A " no dropout policy" would eliminate the stigma attached to the "dropout" label for participants, creating a more positive context for establishing lifelong learning goals.

The establishment of State Literacy Resource Centers created by the National Literacy Institute may offer an opportunity to develop a system which would eliminate the need to identify an adult as a "dropout." Part of the resource centers' mandate is to:

* *develop innovative approaches to the coordination of literacy services within and among states and with the federal government*

* *assist public and private agencies in the coordination and delivery of literacy services (NCFL, 1991).*

These mandates suggest that State Resource Centers could develop a system that would coordinate, integrate, and track adults as they work toward their own long range educational goals. This might work by developing individual educational plans for each adult who chooses to register with the state resource center. Each adult would be given an array of choices to meet their goals -- from family literacy programs, library programs, community college programs, and home or correspondence programs. Each adult could also be assigned a coordinator or counselor to help access services, evaluate the achievement of their goals, and transition into and out of programs, as needed.

Adults with multiple and competing needs may require more time to complete a program and may benefit from easy access to a variety of program options. Policy makers and programs need to develop strategies that help participants transition in and out of programs temporarily, while continuing to work toward individual goals.

Issue: Stability and Adequacy of Funding for Literacy Programs

The SELF HELP program was able to sustain its operations at one site for two and one half years. However, continued efforts to maintain, increase, and stabilize their funding was an overwhelming burden on staff time and program

development. The lack of stable funding for family literacy programs reduces the likelihood that they will adequately develop to meet community needs or to become institutionalized in the community (ILRC, 1992).

The SELF HELP project, which relied on private foundation and small community grants, was not refunded for 1992. A valuable school and community resource that was beginning to form strong roots in the school and the community was lost. The opportunity to evaluate this program over time in order to understand the long-term impacts on program development and families was eliminated.

Program Coordinators Perspective: What Have We Learned?

The following is an edited excerpt from the program coordinator's report (Bramer, 1992) about the lessons learned from her experiences in teaching and coordinating the SELF HELP project. Her experiences and insights should help other practitioners and researchers as they work towards designing, implementing and evaluating this relatively new phenomenon -- family literacy.

1. Structure of the program and classes

Location and time. The convenience of the location and the scheduling of class times around hours most convenient to the families was crucial to the success of the program. Most families did not drive or have cars so this location allowed them to walk to the school. Being located at their child's school facilitated greater interaction with school staff and allowed easier access to children for parent-child time.

Child care. Child care for preschoolers helped to recruit and retain parents with young children. There was also a need for infant and toddler care since some interested participants who had new babies could not attend the program.

2. Needs of parents and children

Stability and support. The participants who were most successful in Project SELF HELP were those who had relatively stable home lives and received support from their spouse or other family member for their participation. Participants needed to feel supported not just by their families, but also by the program staff and each other. Establishing a team approach from the outset led to greater trust and a more lively rapport. The individuals who dropped out of the program did so mostly

because of major life changes, such as moving, surgery, taking a job, or childbirth.

Incentives. Attendance and retention are enhanced by offering incentives for participation. Incentives may help motivate parents to overcome the many barriers they experience in both attendance and rate of learning.

3. Staffing

Program and school link. The assistance and support of the school's parent liaison were essential to the success of the project. The liaison identified potential recruits for the project and encouraged them to attend and to continue their attendance.

Planning time. Staff members need adequate planning time in order to keep complete and comprehensive records of attendance, lesson plans, examples of participants' work, and anecdotal notes.

Volunteers. Volunteers assist staff in meeting the individual needs of adults and children. They can be critical to the program's day-to-day operations -- in the children's programs, in the adult classes, in parent-child time, and in recruitment and retention activities.

Training. Regular, on-going training is vital for staff, who often come from varied and non-traditional teaching fields and who are being asked to address the needs of adults, children, and families in an integrated service delivery model.

4. Summer Reading Program

Location. Holding the summer classes in the library helped to acquaint learners with its resources and to stimulate interest in reading by all members of the family. Both adults and children increased their use of the library's materials by summer's end.

Contract. A contract system might help to insure that more families would participate in more of the summer program's activities. Some families just came on field trip days and therefore did not participate in the preparatory or review and processing activities.

Activities. After six "educational" trips, the final class was a simple picnic in the park. We discovered that "basic childhood games" were an

area that needed to be included -- some children had never played with a jump rope, thrown a frisbee, or played a baseball game.

5. Curriculum

Types of lessons. Simple, non-threatening, and fun activities were most successful for parent-child time, especially at the beginning stages of the program. The adult participants learned best when presented with lessons that related directly to their lives. Pamphlets about nutrition or first aid are widely available, and can be used for reading if screened first for difficult words. Teachers need to be sensitive to the types of past experiences families have to reflect on -- a paragraph on how adults feel about thunderstorms is accessible to all, while a topic like "vacation" may be foreign to some.

Reading strategies. Group reading worked well for most of the participants as a tool for improving their reading skills. However, some readers with learning disabilities, extreme anxiety about reading in front of the group, or other impediments should be given individual instruction. Also, it is vital that group trust be established to avoid learner embarrassment before the practice begins.

Writing strategies. Writing was very difficult for many adults. Most parents did not enjoy writing or even want to try to write. The process of writing was less anxiety producing if a story or letter was begun for participants to finish or they were given a specific structure as an aid to starting a story (e.g.,write a story using eight color words).

Lesson preparation. Preparing the parents for parent-child activities ahead of time seemed to empower them and make them feel more at ease with the lesson. The discussion following parent-child time underscored learning and offered an opportunity for problem-solving.

Researcher's Perspective: What Questions Remain?

Numerous questions remain as we attempt to understand the structure, processes, and effects of family literacy programs on families, schools, children, and communities. These programs attempt to serve children of varied ages; parents with varied educational needs and personal issues; in settings as diverse as schools, Head Start programs, community adult education centers, and libraries. Family literacy programs often have diverse organizational structures and multiple funding sources.

We are accumulating knowledge about what some programs look like, what curricula work best, and what assessments are helpful. Much more research is necessary that looks at particular populations in particular settings and that identifies the specific links between program practices, individual and family needs, other variables, and outcomes for children and families.

This report provided a description of a school-based family literacy program, run by a community organization, that served economically and educationally disadvantaged preschool and elementary age children and their mothers or grandmothers. Many other comprehensive descriptions of various models of family literacy programs are necessary in order to understand more fully the design, implementation, and effects of family literacy programs on different populations.

As we move beyond descriptive reports to evaluations of long-term effects and other longitudinal designs, many methodological problems face evaluators of family literacy programs. This report has identified (and experienced) the methodological challenges related to:

The sample. Small numbers, inconsistent attendance, and multiple entry-exit patterns affect the ability to draw conclusions or to perform higher level statistical analyses. The difficulties in identifying a control group with comparable literacy levels when you have a program sample with very low literacy skills also limits the testing of hypotheses. Larger sample sizes are necessary in order to ask questions related to intensity and frequency of service, variability in educational and personal needs, and other questions.

The measures. Reliable, sensitive, and culturally relevant assessment measures for adults and preschool children in family literacy programs are still in the development stages (ILRC, 1990). Adults with low literacy skills are anxious about being tested and about their performance because of their past negative experiences with testing. Portfolio and performance-based measures require on-going staff training.

The design. Funders often require practitioners to use quantitative measures, which require an experimental or quasi-experimental design, to assess the impact of the program. This leads programs to focus on outcomes before they have had an adequate opportunity to determine whether the program was successfully implemented. Qualitative methods of evaluation, although sometimes less attractive to funders, allow practitioners and evaluators to better understand how the process and context of the program affect participants (ILRC, 1990). Many potential variables, hypotheses, and interaction effects are inherent in family literacy programs. Qualitative methods may help us to isolate the effects of multiple components and multiple levels of service delivery on individuals and families.

Ultimately we need to develop a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods that allow us to reliably document the richness of experiences in family literacy programs.

The evaluation of family literacy programs also represents an opportunity to redefine the practitioner-evaluator relationship in order to reflect the empowerment philosophy of family literacy programs. When evaluators and practitioners "share the power" of program design and program evaluation, they model the role we are encouraging families to take with teachers and other school staff -- for the parent and teacher to "share the power" of educating children. The opportunities for program deliverers to understand, embrace, and use evaluations are greater when they have participated in the design and conduct of the evaluation. For the researcher, the opportunity to be a part of the workings of the program affords unique glimpses into the contextual meaning of family literacy programs at the individual and organizational levels, making the design, analyses, and evaluation results more contextually relevant and useful.

Conclusion

Although the challenges of family literacy programs are many, there is also excitement in the air for those involved in designing and delivering services, families involved in the program, and for researchers evaluating this new hybrid of service delivery. Most interventions facilitate adult development by working with adults only, or child development by working with children only. The family-focused nature of family literacy programs offers an opportunity to have an impact on the quality of family life and individual development.

Much work remains, however, to determine the most effective practices for specific populations to identify the staff qualifications and training needs necessary to implement quality programs and to stabilize funding and policies which impact program development. As we build a sound theoretical and practical base, we must remain cautiously optimistic as family literacy programs proliferate around the country.

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